Dark Hollow

By Anna Katharine Green

Illustrations by C. D. Rhodes

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CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

He was in no better mood than myself to encounter insult, and what had been a simple difference between us flamed into a quarrel which reached its culmination when he mentioned Oliver's name with a taunt, which the boy, for all his obstinate clinging to his journalistic idea, did not deserve.

Knowing my own temper, I drew back into the Hollow.

He followed me.

I tried to speak.

He took the word out of my mouth. This may have been with the intent of quelling my anger, but the tone was rasping, and, noting this and not his words, my hand tightened insensibly about the stick which the devil (or John Scoville) had put in my hand. Did he see this, or was he prompted by some old memory of boyish quarrels that he should give utterance to that quick, sharp laugh of scorn! I shall never know, but ere the sound had ceased the stick was whirling over my head—there came a crash and he fell. My friend! My friend!

Next moment the earth seemed too narrow, the heavens too contracted for my misery. That he was dead—that my blow had killed him, I never doubted for an instant. I knew it, as we know the face of Doom when once it has risen upon us. Never, never again would this lump of clay, which a few minutes before had filled the Hollow with shrillest whistling, breathe or think or speak. He was dead, dead, dead!—And I? What was I?

The name which no man hears unmoved, no amount of repetition makes easy to the tongue or welcome to the ear! . . . the name which I had heard launched in full forensic eloquence so many times in accusation against the wretches I had hardly regarded as being in the same human class as myself rang in my ears as though intoned from the very mouth of hell. I could not escape it. I should never be able to escape it again. Though I was standing in a familiar scene—a scene I had known and frequented from childhood, I felt myself as isolated from my past and as completely set apart from my fellows as the shipwrecked mariner tossed to precarious foothold on his wave-dashed rock. I forgot that other criminals existed.

In that one awful moment I was in my own eyes the only blot upon the universe—the sole inhabitant of the new world into which I had plunged—the world of crime—the world upon which I had sat in judgment before I knew—

What broke the spell? God knows; all I can say is that, drawn by some other will than my own, I found my glance traveling up the opposing bluff till at its top, framed between the ragged wall and towering chimney of Spencer's Folly, I saw the presence I had dreaded, the witness who was to undo me.

It was a woman—a woman with a little child in hand. I did not see her face, for she was just on the point of turning away from the dizzy verge, but nothing could have been plainer than the silhouette which these two made against the flush of that early evening sky.

As long as I could catch a glimpse of this woman's fluttering skirt as she retreated through the ruins, I stood there, self-convicted, above the man I had slain, staring up at that blotch of shining sky which was as the gate of hell to me. Not till their two figures had disappeared and it was quite clear again did the instinct of self-preservation return, and with it the thought of flight.

But where could I fly? No spot in the whole world was secret enough to conceal me now. I was a marked man. Better to stand my ground, and take the consequences than to act the coward's part and slink away like those other men of blood I had so often sat in judgment upon.

Had I but followed this impulse! Had I but gone among my fellows, shown them the mark of Cain upon my forehead and prayed, not for indulgence, but punishment, what days of gnawing misery I should have been spared!

The horror of what lay at my feet drove me from the Hollow. As my steps fell mechanically into the trail down which I had come in innocence and kindly purpose only a few minutes before, a startling thought shot through my benumbed mind. The woman had shown no haste in her turning! There had been a naturalness in her movement, a dignity and a grace which spoke of ease, not shock. What if she had not seen! What if my deed was as yet unknown! Might I not have time for—for what? I did not stop to think; I just pressed on, saying to myself, "Let Providence decide. If I meet any one before I reach my own door my doom is settled. If I do not—"

And I did not. As I turned into the lane from the ravine I heard a sound far down the slope, but it was too distant to create apprehension, and I went calmly on, forcing myself into my usual leisurely gait, if only to gain some control over my own emotions before coming under Oscar's eye.

That sound I have never understood. It could not have been Scoville, since in the short time which had passed he could not have fled from the point where I heard him last into the ravine below Ostrander lane. But, if not he, who was it? Or if it was he, and some other hand threw his stick across my path, whose was this hand and why have we never heard anything about it? It is a question which sometimes floats through my mind, but I did not give it a thought then. I was within sight of home and Oliver's possible presence; and all other dread was as nothing in comparison to what I felt at the prospect of meeting my boy's eye. My boy's eye! my greatest dread then, and my greatest dread still! In my terror of it I walked as to my doom.

The house, which I had left empty, I found empty; Oliver had not yet returned. The absolute stillness of the rooms seemed appalling. Instinctively I looked at the clock. It had stopped. Not at the minute—I do not say it was at the minute—but near, very near the time when from an innocent man I became a guilty one. Appalled at the discovery, I fled to the front. Opening the door, I looked out. Not a creature in sight, and not a sound to be heard. The road was as lonely and seemingly as forsaken as the house. Had time stopped here, too? Were the world and its interests at a pause in horror of my deed? For a moment I believed it; then more natural sensations intervened, and, rejoicing at this lack of disturbance where disturbance meant discovery, I stepped inside again, rewound the clock, and sat down in my own room. My own room! Was it mine any longer? Its walls looked strange; the petty objects of my daily handling, unfamiliar. The change in myself infected everything I saw. I might have been in another man's house for all connection these things seemed to have with me or my life. Like one set apart on an unapproachable shore, I stretched hands in vain toward all that I had known and all that had been of value to me.

But as the minutes passed I began to lose this feeling. Hope, which I thought quite dead, slowly revived. Nothing had happened, and perhaps nothing would.

Men had been killed before, and the slayer passed unrecognized. Why might it not be so in my case? If the woman continued to remain silent; if for any reason she had not witnessed the blow or the striker, who else was there to connect me with an assault committed a quarter of a mile away? No one knew of the quarrel; and if they did, who could be so daring as to associate one of my name with an action so brutal? A judge slay his friend! It would take evidence of a very marked character to make even my political enemies believe that.

As the twilight deepened I rose from my seat and lit the gas. I must not be found skulking in the dark. Then I began to count the ticks measuring off the hour. If thirty minutes more passed without a rush from without I might hope. If twenty?—if ten?—then it was five! then it was—

Ah! The gate had clanged to. They were coming. I could hear steps—voices—a loud ring at the bell. I moved slowly toward the front. I feared the betrayal which my ashy face and trembling hands might make. Agitation after the news was to be expected, but not before! So I left the hall dark when I opened the door. And thus decided my future.

For in the faces of the small crowd which blocked the doorway I detected nothing but commiseration; and when a voice spoke and I heard Oliver's accents surcharged with nothing more grievous than pity, I realized that my secret was as yet unshared, and, seeing that no man suspected me, I forebore to declare my guilt to anyone.

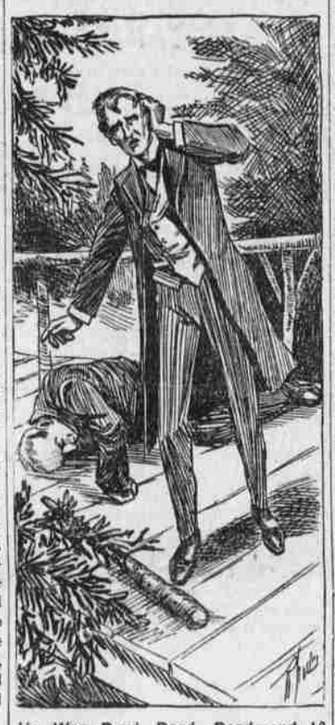
This sudden restoration from soundless depths into the pure air of respect and sympathy confused me; and beyond the words "Killed! Struck down by the bridge!" I heard little, till slowly, dully, like the call of a bell issuing from a smothering mist, I caught the sound of a name. It struck my ear and gradually it dawned upon my consciousness that another man had been arrested for my crime and that the safety, the reverence and the commiseration that were so dear to me had been bought at a price no man of honor might pay.

But I was no longer a man of honor. I was a wretched criminal swaying above a gulf of infamy in which I had seen others swallowed but had never dreamed of being engulfed myself. I never thought of letting myself go—not at this crisis—not while my heart was warm with its resurgence into the old life.

And so I let pass this opportunity for confession. Afterwards it was too late—or seemed too late to my demoralized judgment.

My first real awakening to the extraordinary horrors of my position was when I realized that circumstances were likely to force me into presiding over the trial of the man Scoville. I feigned sickness, only to realize that my place would be taken by Judge Grosvenor, a notoriously prejudiced man. If he sat, it would go hard with the prisoner, and I wanted the prisoner acquitted. I had no grudge against John Scoville. Of course I wanted to save him, and if the only help I could now give him was to sit as judge upon his case, then would I sit as judge whatever mental torture it involved.

Sending for Mr. Black, I asked him point blank whether in face of the circumstance that the victim of this murder was my best friend, he would not prefer to plead his case before Judge Grosvenor. He answered no: that he had more confidence in my equity even under these circumstances than in that of my able, but headstrong colleague, and prayed me to get



He Was Dead, Dead, Dead—and I? What Was I?

well. He did not say that he expected me on this very account to show even more favor toward his client than I might otherwise have done, but I am sure that he meant it; and, taking his attitude as an omen, I obeyed his injunction and was soon well enough to take my seat upon the bench.

What men saw facing them from the bench was an automaton wound up to do so much work each day. The real Ostrander was not there, but stood, an unseen presence at the bar, undergoing trial side by side with John Scoville, for a crime to make angels weep and humanity hide its head: hypocrisy!

But the days went by and the inexorable hour drew nigh for the accused man's release or condemnation. Circumstances were against him—so was his bearing, which I alone understood. If, as all felt, it was that of a guilty man, it was so because he had been guilty in intent if not in fact. He had meant to attack Algernon Etheridge.

He had run down the ravine for that purpose, knowing my old friend's whistle and envying him his watch. Or why his foolish story of having left his stick behind him? But the sound of my approaching steps higher up on the path had stopped him in midcareer and sent him rushing up the slope ahead of me. When he came back after a short circuit of the fields beyond, it was to find his crime forestalled and by the very weapon he had thrown into the Hollow as he went scurrying by. He had meant to attack Etheridge. It was the shock of the discovery of the body, heightened by the use he made of it to secure the booty thus thrown in his way without crime, which gave him the hang-dog look we all noted.

That there were other reasons—that the place recalled another scene of brutality in which intention had been followed by act, I did not then know. It was sufficient to me then that my safety was secured by his own guilty consciousness and the prevarications into which it led him. Instead of owning up to the encounter he had so barely escaped he confined himself to the simple declaration of having heard voices somewhere near the bridge, which to all who know the ravine appeared impossible under the conditions named.

Yet, for all the incongruities and the failure of his counsel to produce any definite impression by the prisoner's persistent denial of having whittled the stick or even of having carried it into Dark Hollow, I expected a verdict in his favor. Indeed, I was so confident of it that I suffered less during the absence of the jury than at any other time, and when they returned, with an air of solemn decision which proclaims unanimity of mind and a ready verdict, I was so prepared for his acquittal that for the first time since the opening of the trial I felt myself a being of flesh and blood, with human sentiments and hopes. And it was: "Guilty!"

When I awoke to a full realization of what this entailed (for I must have lost consciousness for a minute, though no one seemed to notice), the one fact staring me in the face was that it would devolve upon me to pronounce his sentence; upon me, Archibald Ostrander, an automaton no longer, but a man realizing to the full his part in this miscarriage of justice. Chaos confronted me, and in contemplation of it, I fell ill.

Somehow, strange as it may appear, I had thought little of this possibility previous to this moment. I found myself upon the brink of this new gulf before the dizziness of my escape from the other had fully passed. Do you wonder that I recoiled, sought to gain time, put off delivering the sentence from day to day? I had sinned—sinned irredeemably—but there are depths of infamy beyond which a man cannot go. I had reached that point.

What saved me? A new discovery, and the loving sympathy of my son Oliver. One night—a momentous one to me—he came to my room and, closing the door behind him, stood with his back to it, contemplating me in a way that startled me.

What had happened? What lay behind this new and penetrating look, this anxious and yet persistent manner? I dared not think. I dared not yield to the terror which must follow thought. Terror blanches the cheek and my cheek must never blanch under anybody's scrutiny. Never, never, so long as I lived.

"Father"—the tone quieted me, for I knew from its gentleness that he was hesitating to speak more on his own account than on mine—"you are not looking well; this thing worries you. I hate to see you like this. Is it just the loss of your old friend, or—or—"

He faltered, not knowing how to proceed.

"Sometimes I think," he recommenced, "that you don't feel quite sure of this man Scoville's guilt. Is that so? Tell me, father?"

I did not know what to make of him. There was no shrinking from me; no conscious or unconscious accusation in voice or look, but there was a desire to know, and a certain latent resolve behind it all that marked the line between obedient boyhood and thinking, determining man. With all my dread—a dread so great I felt the first grasp of age upon my heartstrings at that moment—I recognized no other course than to meet this inquiry of his with the truth—that is, with just so much of the truth as was needed. No more, not one jot more. I therefore answered, and with a show of self-possession at which I now wonder:

"You are not far from right, Oliver. I have had moments of doubt. The evidence, as you must have noticed, is purely circumstantial."

"What evidence would satisfy you? What would you consider a conclusive proof of guilt?"

I told him in the set phrases of my profession.

"Then," he declared as I finished, "you may rest easy as to this man's right to receive a sentence of death."

I could not trust my ears.

"I know from personal observation," he proceeded, approaching me with a firm step, "that he is not only capable of the crime for which he has been convicted, but that he has actually committed one under similar circumstances, and possibly for the same end."

And he told me the story of that night of storm and bloodshed—a story which will be found lying near this, in my alcove of shame and contrition.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Daily Thought

I seek no thorns, and I catch the small joys. If the door is low I stoop down. If I can remove the stone out of my way I do so. If it be too heavy, I go around it. And thus every day I find something which gladdens me.—Goethe.

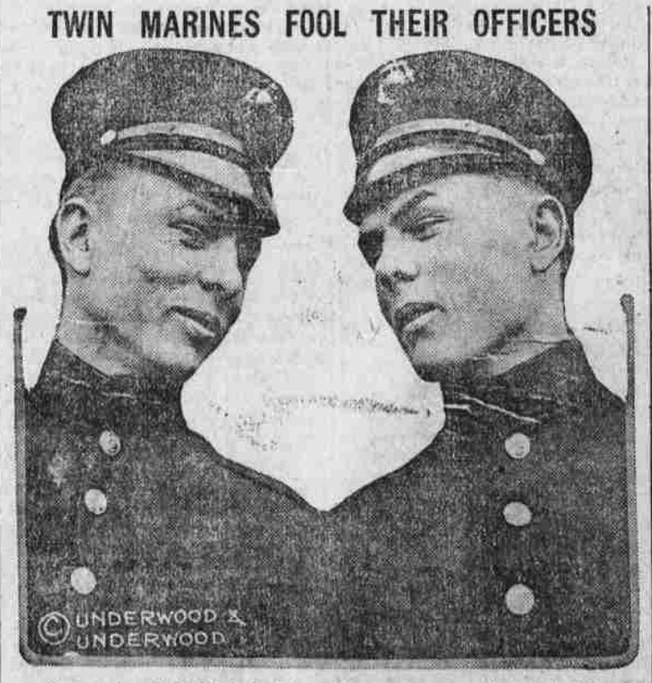
WAGON LOADS OF TYPHUS VICTIMS IN SERBIA

Typhus is making horrible ravages in the ranks of the Serbian and Austrian armies, and among the civilians as well. The death rate is frightful, and ox carts laden with the coffins of the victims pass in continual procession to the burial places.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR AERONAUTICS

Secretary of War Garrison formally opened the first meeting of the National advisory committee for aeronautics, a committee appointed by the president and provided for in recent legislation to study and advance the science of aeronautics in this country. Gen. George Scriven was chosen the committee's first chairman. The meeting was held in the war department. Back row, left to right: Naval Constructor H. C. Richardson; Prof. John F. Hayford, Northwestern university; Capt. Mark Bristol, chief of the navy department's aeronautical bureau, and Col. Samuel Reber, U. S. A. signal corps. Front row, left to right: Prof. W. F. Durand, Leland Stanford university; Dr. S. W. Stratton, chief of United States bureau of standards; Gen. George P. Scriven, chief signal officer, U. S. A.; Prof. C. F. Marvin, chief of United States weather bureau, and Prof. M. I. Pupin of Columbia university.

TWIN MARINES FOOL THEIR OFFICERS



Two marines have lately had the entire marine corps stationed at League island, near Philadelphia, shaking with silent laughter by the trouble they are causing. After eight months in the service their company officers and their fellow marines cannot tell them apart. They are Leslie and Hallie Woodcock, twins, twenty years old, and hail from South Carolina, where they enlisted on the condition that they would never be put into separate companies. Many efforts have been made by their officers to do this, but they have a written guaranty from the recruiting station that it is their privilege to serve their country together.

GERMANS SHELLING THE RUSSIANS

This photograph of a German battery shelling a force of Russians was taken not far from Lodz, Russian Poland.

GEN. ALVARO OBREGON

Alvaro Obregon is Carranza's first commander and is recognized as the ablest general in Mexico. Though a military genius, he hates war and declares he is fighting for a revolutionary ideal—for land and labor reforms. Most of the men in his ranks are regularly organized trade unionists. Obregon has been administering some severe defeats to Villa.

COMING LATE TO DINNER

Really a Form of Egotism, According to Chauncey M. Depew, Who Should Know.

"Why do some people always come late to formal dinners?" is a question asked of Chauncey M. Depew, a veteran and famous diner-out. His answer was not complimentary to tardy guests.

"Coming late to dinner," said Mr. Depew, "is a form of egotism. It is a pose, usually, affected to command attention. The person who comes last and very late knows that the other guests will be informed who it is that is late, and that his or her entrance will be an event. With some people it is a sort of advertisement of having remembered only when it was too late to get ready in time, because of such a multitude of engagements.

"Many years ago one prominent lady was always late for dinner. Her excuses were innumerable, and always occupied the attention of the whole room, like a speech before dinner. I sent her an invitation to one of my dinners, fixing the time half an hour before the hour named for the other invited guests. Consequently she was not the last to arrive, and did not keep the company waiting. She never forgave me.

"Of course in Europe royalty is always late for dinner, so as to give an opportunity for all the guests to arrive. If anyone comes after royalty has arrived, they haven't arrived, their chair, in the meantime, having disappeared from the table."

Intelligence of the Beaver.

The life history of the beaver discloses a succession of episodes in each of which a reasoning faculty is employed. Unlike other animals, the beaver's intelligence consists not only in doing the same things over and over again, but in the ability to deal understandingly with novel situations. Certain of its actions probably arise from the same instinct that governs the rest of the lower animals, but the orderly sequence in which they are performed leads many to believe that the beaver shares with man a claim to reasoning faculties.

REALLY OF LITTLE SERVICE

Hydroaeroplane Not Likely to Be Developed, Is the Opinion of Men Who Should Know.

There seems some reason for believing that the hydroaeroplane, that is, the aeroplane carrying a boat or float beneath it for alighting on the water, was a development in the wrong direction. In the first place, such machines cannot be made seaworthy. Even now the aeroplane flies in winds that keep smaller water-borne craft shut up in port—winds kicking up such a sea that alighting on it would be difficult if not impossible. Secondly, the aeroplane is steadily increasing its radius of action, and if past growth is any criterion, will eventually be able to traverse even the Atlantic in a single flight. The use of duplicate engines will greatly minimize the danger of forced alighting, and the time should not be far distant when the accidents of the past due to structural weakness under sudden strains will be as rare as they have been common.

Finally, the use of a "mother ship," that is, a marine platform for launching and receiving again from the air the aeroplane scouts of the fleet at sea, seems a more feasible means of solving this problem than that of fastening an alighting boat to each plane.

Best Hour for Work.

It is a curious fact in psychology that nobody can stay at the same mental and physical level for twenty-four hours together. In the morning you are more matter of fact, for instance, than later in the day. It is in the morning that the best brain work is done, too—brain work of the sort that requires industry and clear thinking. And it is about eleven in the morning that our body reaches its highest point of energy. In other words, you are stronger, though almost imperceptibly, at eleven in the morning than at three in the afternoon. You reach the highest point twice in the day, for about five in the afternoon the muscular energy has risen again. But from five onward it declines steadily all through the evening, and on till between two and three a. m.

EQUAL TO THE OCCASION

Bishop Crozier Neatly Extricated Himself From Hole Which Seemed a Pretty Deep One.

As an illustration of the great tact possessed by the church, Mr. J. C. Percy quotes in his book, "Bulls and Blunders," the following story once told by the primate of all Ireland (Doctor Crozier):

A bishop took the chair at a parochial "at home" where an impromptu concert was part of the program. The right reverend chairman called upon a certain lady to sing. She demurred, saying she could not sing. The bishop insisted. At last the lady consented. She had not gone very far when it was evident that the lady was right, and that she knew her own vocal powers best.

After a few minutes of awful suspense, the audience wondered what the good man would say for himself for insisting upon such an infliction, and how he would escape from the dilemma. The bishop, however, was equal to the occasion. When the song was over, the worthy chairman got up, reached the lady his hand to lead her down from the platform saying as he did so:

"Next time you tell us you can't sing we'll know whether to believe you or not."

There's a lot of useless trouble caused by folks who would rather make a big failure than a small success.—Birmingham Press.